



## **KOREA** by Jae-Woong Kim, Jae-Bong Yoo and Heekwon Sohn

Kim, J., Yoo, J. & Sohn, H. (2012). Japan. In C. L. Glenn & J. De Groof (Eds.), *Balancing freedom, autonomy and accountability in education: Volume 4* (137-154). Tilburg, NL: Wolf Legal Publishers.

### *Overview*

Until the mid-1990s, the education system in the Republic of Korea was highly regulated and centralized. The Ministry of Education (currently, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) was solely responsible for the formulation and implementation of educational policies as a whole, including curriculum design, textbook approvals, and administrative and financial support. Due to this centralized governance system, provincial educational offices, individual schools, and even parents and students enjoyed little autonomy.

In response to criticism of this rigid system, education reforms intended to make Korea more internationally competitive were enacted in the mid-1990s. In February 1994, the Presidential Commission for Education Reform (PCER) was formed. In May 1995, this commission produced a series of education reform proposals (ERP) collectively named the *Establishment of a New Education System towards Edutopia*. The basic goals of the proposed system were to provide more learner-oriented pedagogical models, to diversify methods of assessment, and to encourage school-based management models in an attempt to promote greater autonomy at local levels. These goals were coupled with plans for greater accountability and an aim to strike a better balance between liberty and equity in the overall system (PCER 1995, 21-22). In 1998, four years after the PCER introduced the new education system, the Ministry of Education initiated a reform project entitled *Vision for Education Beyond 2002: Creating a New School Culture*. Four major initiatives were put forth in an effort to promote the New School Culture: 1) the creation of autonomous and participatory school communities, 2) the implementation of a student-centered curriculum, 3) diversification of methods for evaluating students, such as performance-based evaluations, and 4) initiatives to enhance the professional development of teachers (Ministry of Education 1998, 34-132). At their core, these education reforms were aimed at decentralizing the Korean system. They will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

## *The structure of schooling*

Korea has three types of schools, national, public, and private, which are mainly distinguished according to the different bodies that establish them. National schools are established by the central government, public schools are established by the provincial governments, and private schools are established by independent educational foundations. The number of national schools, which are normally attached to National Colleges of Education, is quite limited. However, the way in which national schools are operated is not different from public schools in that both are under the direct control of provincial education offices of education.

Despite the major reforms of the 1990s, the basic structure of the Korean school system has remained a single-track 6-3-3-4 system since 1951. Korean students receive six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, three years of high school, and, when applicable, four years of college or university education.

Currently, pupils are required to attend school beginning at the age of six until they reach fourteen years of age. Although primary schooling has been free and compulsory since the 1960s, when elementary school enrollments expanded considerably, free and compulsory education for middle school students was only implemented in rural areas (where families tend to have lower incomes) in 1985. It was expanded to rural areas in 1992, and to the whole country, including all cities, in 2002 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2006, 42-44). High school in Korea is not compulsory, although most students do attend. In 2010 the high school completion rate was 94.6% and about 80% of

the high school graduates went on to higher education institutes (KEDI, 2011).

High schools are divided into three major types: general high schools, vocational high schools, and special-purpose high schools. In the first year of high school (10th grade), general high schools teach ten basic subjects, as do elementary schools and middle schools. In the 11th and 12th grades, students can choose from classes in humanities and social studies and/or science and vocational training, depending on aptitude and interest. In contrast, vocational high schools provide both general secondary education and specialized vocational training in various fields, including agriculture, technology, industry, commerce, fishery, and home economics. Most vocational schools can be recognized by name, such as Information Technology High School, Design High School, Automobile High School, or Animation High School. Special-purpose high schools have also been established throughout Korea. These are specifically intended to train promising students and develop their talents and potential. They include foreign language high schools, international high schools, science high schools, and art high schools (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2006, 44- 45; Mok 2006, 40-41).

The entrance examination for general high school admittance was abolished in 1974, shortly following the abolition in 1969 of the entrance examination for middle schools. Students are now admitted to high schools on the basis of lottery assignments, meaning that they apply for a seat at the school that they would like to attend and that schools admit students in a random manner, picking as many student names from a *lottery* as they can accommodate. The only exception to this lottery system was for schools in the city of Seoul. Until 2009, students living in Seoul were assigned to a school and did not have the opportunity to state a preferred high school. However in 2009, a new “apply first, assign next” policy was introduced by the Seoul Office of Education.

Three recent developments in Korean education merit attention: the revision of the grade structure of the school system, the emergence of private high schools, and the success of private tutoring institutions. With regard to the revision of the grade structure of the system, critics believe that the current 6-3-3-4 (primary school-middle school-high school-college) structure needs to be altered in favor of a 5-3-4-4 structure. This suggestion has come in response to changes in the job market and calls to better address the physical and psychological development of youth.

Two types of private schools exist in Korea, Independent private schools and private high schools. Independent private schools are established by independent educational foundations, which are not-for-profit entities. These schools, which have been operating on a trial basis since 2002 in various parts of the country, are free to select students for admission and may set their own educational goals, tuition, and fees. They are unique in that they operate independently of governmental financial support, they are managed independently, and they are free to design their own curricula. In contrast, private schools are established by non-government groups but need the approval of the local government to exist and are subject to government regulation. Private schools may charge nominal fees, though those fees generally amount to no more than families would pay for public schools that are established by government. Government provides financial support to private schools much in the same way it does to government schools. That financial

support includes, for example, teachers' salaries.

Out-of-school time private tutoring institutions, known as *Hagwon*, have also come to play a significant role in the Korean education system in recent years. Similar to the *Juku* schools of Japan, many Korean students attend *Hagwon* at the end of the school day in order to boost their grades and to prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test, which is required for college entrance.

## *The legal framework*

There are four major education laws in Korea, known as Acts: The Basic Education Act, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, The Private School Act, and The Education Civil Servant Act. To support and further define the content of these Acts, Korea also has laws related to education known as decrees. Decrees are made by the executive branch of government when it implements or delegates the authority to implement the Acts. These laws are especially important because the Constitution prohibits Congress from delegating law-making power to regional and local authorities without establishing specific criteria and limits.

The last type of education laws that guide schooling in Korea are designed and implemented at the local level. Local authorities have some regulatory power, although they may not make laws or decisions that violate those made at higher levels of government. For example, a local authority may not mandate the exclusive use of Korean agricultural products for school lunches because this would violate the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement on free trade, which has the same effect as an Act.

## *Provisions for education in the Korean Constitution*

The first provision for education in the Korean Constitution states that education is a fundamental right and assumes that education:

1. provides the basis for a human cultural and economic development;
2. promotes Korean culture;
3. contributes to democracy by emphasizing democratic citizenship through rational and continuing education;
4. embodies the principles of the welfare state by realizing substantial equality in both vocational life and economic life and through ability-based equal education (1994. 2. 24. 93C.Ct.-Ma192).

Under the Korean Constitution, the right to education includes the rights to both

freedom and welfare. Educational freedom, in this context, entails equal access to education and the prohibition of unreasonable discrimination with regard to access to education. It also includes the right for a parent to choose the school his or her child attends, as well as the instructor, curriculum, date of school entry, and the primary language of education (Sohn 2004a, 123-133). The right to welfare means that individuals have the right to request basic necessities from the state. With regard to education, the welfare right includes the right to request that the state provide educational facilities, instructors, and scholarships. In recent years policy makers have debated whether the children of illegal immigrants have the right to education. The Korean government has decided to stop prosecuting illegal immigrants whose illegal status was discovered when they put their children in school, thus assuring the right to education for the children of illegal immigrants.

## *Principals of education law*

The Constitution sets forth the principles of education law. The first constitutional principle addresses the provision of ability-based equal educational opportunity (Constitution Article 31 Section 1). The second constitutional principle addresses autonomy, professionalism, and neutrality in education (Constitution Article 31 Section 4). Educational autonomy refers to institutional autonomy, which means that an outside entity cannot interfere with the education of children without justification. It also refers to the autonomy afforded to individuals working in the education sector, indicating that school leaders have a right to manage educational organizations without unjust interference from the state or any other entity (Sohn 2004b, 89-108). Unjust interference, as defined by the Constitutional Court of Korea, is interference that prevents a school from realizing its educational philosophy, or mission (2003. 3. 27. 2002C.Ct.-Ma573). This provision is, however, balanced by the constitutional expectation that all schools promote social values and the public interest while ensuring student rights.

Two kinds of educational neutrality, political and religious, are important in the Korean context. Korean educational and constitutional scholars disagree as to the definition of political neutrality (Sohn 2004c, 403-404). Constitutional scholars believe political neutrality implies that education and politics should be distinctly separate because all politics are inherently about power, and education should be free from the influence of power. On the other hand, educational scholars take the term political neutrality to mean that state-provided education should be *non-partisan*, not promoting one political point of view over another. The concept of religious neutrality as it pertains to education derives from constitutional requirements for the separation between religion and politics as well as a prohibition on the establishment of a national religion--thus all religions should be treated equally in Korean schools. Although instruction in a specific religion is prohibited in public schools, general or comparative religious instruction is permitted. At present, religious instruction is a very contentious issue in Korean education. There is great debate as to whether private religious institutions affiliated with elementary, middle, and high schools can require students to take courses on specific religions in order to graduate.

## *Basic education act*

Aside from constitutional requirements for education, the Basic Education Act is the primary law addressing education in Korea. This act provides a framework within which other laws must operate. The Basic Education Act stipulates the constitutional principles of education law and outlines five points with regard to the rights and duties of educational stakeholders:

- Learners' rights are to be respected at all times. Special consideration should be given to curricular content, pedagogical methods, facilities, and educational texts.
- Guardians have both a right and a duty to educate their children. They can and should make their opinions about education known to schools and schools must display respect for those opinions.
- The professional status of teachers should be respected, and teachers should make a livable salary. Teachers have a right to organize with regard to salary demands. For their part, teachers are expected to commit themselves to professional development, to promote the quality of education, to be ethical, and to impart ethics and knowledge to students.
- Founders of schools and adult education institutions are charged with securing and managing teachers, finances, and facilities. Principals, founders, and directors of schools and adult education institutions should recruit learners and educate them according to the law. They should also record, accommodate, and help to improve individual learning processes and outcomes.
- In specific areas, state and the local authorities guide and supervise schools and adult educational institutions, regardless of whether such institutions are privately established or established by government. State and local authorities implement policies on (among other things) the following:
  - gender equity in education;
  - learning ethics, such as those pertaining to research and examinations;
  - special education;
  - gifted education;
  - early childhood education;



- vocational education;
- science and technology education;
- information technology;
- financial support for private schools;
- school evaluation and accreditation;
- learners' and teachers' health;
- student financial aid;
- international education, including global citizenship education, education for Koreans abroad, and international educational cooperation with foreign governments and international organizations.

### *Elementary and secondary education act*

Elementary and secondary education in Korea is administered mainly on the basis of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This Act makes education compulsory. It states that guardians who fail to send their children to both elementary and middle school can be fined up to one million won (approximately eleven hundred U. S. dollars). Also, the Act encourages student autonomy and due process with regard to student discipline. Finally, the Act regulates principal and teacher certification.

### *Private school act*

The Private School Act regulates the establishment and management of private schools, including the organization and roles of school corporations (founding bodies) and trustees. Its purpose is to encourage the development of these schools and to protect their character and autonomy.

The reauthorized Private School Act of 2006 provides for state regulation of private schools as a means to preventing corruption and strengthening their *public function*, or ability to serve a wide range of the public. However, some school boards and leaders, in particular those that oversee faith-based schools, have strongly criticized this Act because they see it as a regulatory burden that can adversely affect a school's ability to fulfill its purpose and/or implement its mission.

## *Freedom to establish non-state schools*

Two types of non-state schools exist in Korea, private schools and alternative schools. While home schooling is not a legal option for Korean parents, it is nonetheless practiced in Korea.

### *Private schools*

Any organization or group of individuals can establish a private elementary, middle, or high school in Korea provided they receive approval to do so from the provincial superintendent. Private schools are most commonly founded by individuals or not-for-profit school corporations. Individual and organizations may found and manage more than one school.

Persons or groups wishing to establish a private elementary, middle, or high school must submit documents to provincial authorities outlining such things as the mission of the school, how the mission will be fulfilled, how the school will be funded, what types of facilities the school will require, and how such facilities will be procured (The Elementary and Secondary Education Decree Article 3). Once such documents have been approved by provincial authorities, the school may be established. The school may only be opened, however, pending a successful series of screenings to ascertain the adequacy of facilities and finances, for example.

### *Alternative schools*

The purpose of alternative schools is to educate students who have dropped out of regular schools and to accommodate students who require more individualized instruction through diverse programs or methods. Alternative schools might emphasize, for example, experiential learning methods or character education.

(The Elementary and Secondary Education Act Article 60 Section 3). Unlike public schools, alternative schools do not have to abide by legal requirements for teacher and principal certification, nor are they required to follow the national curriculum. Alternative schools are also exempt from providing school records, following traditional grade structures, and from using state-mandated texts.

As of 2008, eight alternative middle schools and twenty-one alternative high schools had been authorized by provincial governments. Students enrolled in these schools will obtain the credits and diplomas necessary for college entrance upon successful completion of course work. There are also more than seventy non-authorized alternative schools in Korea, half of which are at the elementary level. Students at these schools have to take examinations in order to obtain official certificates of course completion, as course completion does not automatically earn the credits and diplomas necessary for college entrance. In comparison to authorized alternative schools, unauthorized alternative



schools are likely to enjoy greater autonomy in school management.

## *Homeschooling*

Despite its status as a viable option in some other countries, home schooling is not a legal option in Korea. Guardians who do not send their children to the elementary and/or middle school may be fined up to but no more than one million won (Elementary and Secondary Education Act Article 68 Section 1). Despite the law and the fine, researchers estimate the number of homeschoolers to be in the hundreds. In addition, the number of Korean families in favor of home schooling is increasing for various reasons. Parents tend to object to state schooling on the grounds of religion, the problems that students might experience with teachers or classmates, or the perceived uniformity of education offered by traditional state schools. Home schooling will be an important issue in the near future, because it is likely that the conflict between the state and parents regarding who has the fundamental right to direct the upbringing of children will become more intense. Indeed, parents and guardians have begun to present the argument that compulsory education, as defined by the Constitution (Section 31 Section 2) is not the same as compulsory schooling (Kim 1999).

## *School choice not limited by family income*

The main sources of school funding in Korea are the central government, provincial education offices, and the private sector. The central government provides funding to provincial education offices, which help support elementary and secondary schools. The central government pays about 85 percent of school expenses and provincial offices make up the deficit from their own budgets. Families that opt for private schooling at the elementary level pay their own tuition and expenses, although private middle and high schools receive government funding. The difference between these schools and their public counterparts, is that private middle and high schools may discriminate as to the pupils that they accept (Mok 2006, 29-31).

For Korean families, choice of elementary schools is limited by family income. Public elementary school pupils are assigned to schools according to where they live, but school assignments do not prevent families who can afford to pay tuition from sending their children to private schools. Students at most middle and high schools (including private schools), however, are assigned to schools within their residential districts. Since the tuition fees of private schools are the same as those of public schools, students attend the school within their residential district. Public schools must accept pupils via a lottery system and they may not choose pupils based upon test scores or other selection criteria. Vocational secondary schools, special-purpose high schools, and some private secondary schools may select applicants according to pre-determined criteria. Thus, in principle, students in Korea have the *right* to go to any school they choose to attend. In reality, however, it is not easy for students from low-income families to attend independent

private schools, which are very selective.

## *School distinctiveness protected by law and policy*

Korean society is characterized by authoritative and centralized control, and the education sector is no exception. In the past, all schools, including private schools, were operated by the central government: individual schools did not have freedom of curricular decision-making or control over how pupils were admitted, how money was spent, or how principals and teachers were recruited. Even most private schools were not free to make decisions about admitting pupils.

In 1995, measures to enhance school autonomy were included in the educational reform proposals (ERP) put forth by the Kim Young-Sam administration (Presidential Commission on Education Reform, 1996). The ERP envisioned a new education system in Korea that was focused on providing distinctive educational options for families. A revision of the national curriculum was also implemented to allow schools greater curricular discretion. Changes in school finance accompanied these provisions for school autonomy. The ERP mandated that schools receive government funds in the form of block grants, which allow individual schools more freedom in setting and managing their own budgets. Additionally, the ERP required that all public and private schools be headed by school management committees, which will be discussed in further detail below.

## *Distinctive character*

School management committees are comprised of a principal, teachers, parents, community leaders, alumni leaders, and specialists in education. Per the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, they are to be formed for all public and private schools in Korea (August 31, 1999). School management committees deliberate on:

- enactment and revision of school charters and school rules;
- school budgets and statements of account balances;
- content of school curricula (i.e., elective courses that may be offered to supplement the national curriculum);
- selection of textbook and instructional materials;
- hiring of school leaders (principals);
- extra-curricular activities;
- out-of-school use of school buildings;

- provision of lunch for pupils; and
- regulations for school operations.

It is important to note that school management committees for private schools play only the role of an advisory committee with regard to the school responsibilities mentioned here. They do not formally deliberate on the issues. The only exception to this is that school management committees at both public and private schools deliberate and decide upon the formation and use of school development funds.

Critics of school management committees claim that they have a merely symbolic function, or that they are the *puppets* of school principals. Any truth in these claims may be due to the inexperience of committee members or the long tradition of authoritative control enjoyed by school principals in Korea. Research shows, however, that school management committees have a positive effect with regard to enhancing school distinctiveness. They have also been shown to democratize overall school management and have proven useful to the construction of school- community partnerships (Jeong & Park 2005; Kim, Do, & Lee 2004; Young 2000, 92-93).

In an effort to further enhance school distinctiveness, the central government has also revised the national curriculum. This revision granted schools greater latitude in determining curricular content. The seventh national curriculum was phased into elementary schools in 2000 and into high schools in 2004. It is a student-centered curriculum that is different from the previous national curricula in many ways. As opposed to its highly prescriptive predecessor, the current curriculum provides schools with a basic core around which they can create their own curricula. Is my revision accurate?

Schools follow the national curriculum from the elementary level until the first year of high school. The curriculum comprises ten subject matters, including Korean, mathematics, science, and English. It also allows students to follow different course tracks according to ability and aptitude. One of the important features of this new curriculum (also referred to as the *seventh* national curriculum, is that it provides additional discretion hours to schools, which give schools more room to create and implement their own curricula. Elementary schools have two discretion hours per week, middle schools have four, and high schools have six. In the second and third years of high school, the absence of a core national curriculum allows students to select courses according to their future career plans and competency levels.

Since the introduction of the seventh national curriculum, there have been substantial changes in schooling. However, some schools have had difficulty realizing the goals of this curricular initiative, perhaps due to the fact that school managers and teachers are not accustomed to having so much curricular discretion. Some schools have failed to create their own local curricula or to find appropriate teachers and resources for elective courses. Despite this noncompliance, it is widely recognized that the new national curriculum is a cornerstone of school distinctiveness and an attempt to meet the diverse needs of communities and students.

New methods of providing funding to schools have also had an important impact on the abilities of individual schools to develop distinctive characters. Under the former highly centralized administrative system in Korea, individual schools had no freedom to determine their operational budgets, nor did they have discretionary funding. Instead, provincial education offices were responsible for all matters relating to school finance. Under this model, public schools could not effectively respond to the changing and diverse needs of students, parents, and teachers.

Changes to the general method of school finance in Korea have also had positive effects on school distinctiveness. The block grant system has allowed individual schools to create and implement school budgets according to local priorities. Notably, teachers seem satisfied with the new system, since it increases the transparency of school finance and allows for more money for instructional activities (Jin, Lee, & Kim, 2007).

### *Decisions about admitting pupils*

Comparatively speaking, the Korean education system does not allow for a large degree of school choice. Very few schools, including private schools, have the power to decide who is admitted. This is rooted in the equity-driven policy that has been a part of the Korean education system for decades. Despite the strong voices of parents and denominational private schools, efforts by the government to expand parental choice of schools rarely succeed.

Nonetheless, a handful of private elementary schools and special-purpose high schools do enjoy decision-making power when it comes to admitting pupils. As of April 2010, there were 76 private elementary schools, 647 private middle schools, and 946 private high schools operating in Korea that enjoyed such power. This translates to 1.3%, 20.7%, and 42.0% of all the elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively. Private elementary schools are given full decision-making power with regard to the admission of students, though examinations for admission are prohibited at this level. In the case that a school has more applicants than it can admit, however, admissions are usually decided by lottery. This unique admissions system is an interesting phenomenon; while these tuition driven schools legally have the power to admit students, considerations of equity in admissions cause school leaders to employ the lottery process. Students at private elementary schools have to pay the tuition and fees on their own, as public subsidy is not provided.

All private middle schools and almost all private high schools are publicly subsidized and therefore do not enjoy decision-making power when it comes to selecting students, so there is little difference between public and private schools at this level. The only major difference is that private schools are founded by some body or individual, instead of the state. Recently, more students and parents are demanding the right to select their own schools, and private schools, especially denominational private schools, are calling for autonomy in admitting students. So far, these demands

have been denied in the name of the *public function* of private schools.

It would be remiss not to mention the *High School Equalization Policy of 1974* in any discussion of procedures for admitting pupils to Korean schools. The equalization policy was launched in order to break down the hierarchical order of general high schools and to equalize them. Under this policy, students are assigned to schools in their residential school district by lottery. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act Article 47 Section 2 stipulates specific methods for admitting students under the equalization policy scheme.

The equalization policy has been supported by the public because it was expected to relieve students from the *examination hell* associated with applying to hierarchically organized high schools, to normalize middle school education, and to better serve the intrinsic aims of education. However, opponents of the plan argue that it leads to heterogeneous groupings in classrooms, sacrifices the value of excellence, and makes parents rely on private tutoring. The equalization policy is also criticized for lowering the general quality of education, as schools no longer have to compete to attract students. A strong voice for abolishing the policy comes from parents deprived of the right to choose schools, as well as from private schools that have lost the autonomy to select students and create their own distinctive curricula (Korean Educational Development Institute 2005a; OECD 1998).

In what can be seen as a small effort to answer these claims, the number of special-purpose high schools in Korea has expanded. As previously mentioned, such schools have the power to determine who they will admit, although they may not give formal written examinations. They are distinct from traditional public schools because they have more power to decide their own curricula.

Furthermore, some *independent* private high schools are being operated on a trial basis. However, these schools, which are strongly criticized by teachers' unions as being only for "nobles," are not being expanded in large numbers. Their expansion is subject to the will of government.

Despite this small scale move to appease critics, the Korean government appears to have a strong will to maintain the equalization policy. The government believes that the merits of the policy outweigh its limitations, and the general public seems to agree. According to a survey administered by Kim et al. (2001), 69.7% thought it was a good idea to maintain the equalization policy. Another study by Park et al. (2002) indicated that 63.1% of sampled parents and 67.2% of sampled teachers supported the equalization policy.

## *Decisions about staff*

Teachers in both public and private schools are required to have certificates, which are issued to people who have completed teacher preparation programs. As of the

year 2009, there were 42 colleges of education, 134 graduate schools of education, and 158 teacher preparation programs at Korean universities. Admission quotas for these institutes in 2009 were 10,948 persons, 20,309 persons, and 16,269 persons, respectively (KEDI 2010).

Public school teachers are employed by the central government, while private school teachers are employed by the foundations that run individual private schools. Although working conditions and remuneration for public and private school teachers are identical because teacher salaries are subsidized and regulated by the government, public and private schools have different recruiting systems. Applicants wishing to work at a public school are required to pass an examination administered by provincial education offices once a year. The examination includes tests of subject knowledge and pedagogy, as well as in-depth interviews. In addition, individual public schools do not have the authority to hire and fire teachers. Each school has to accept the teachers sent by the provincial education offices, and these teachers are rotated between schools every five years in an attempt to equalize teaching staff system-wide.

Unlike public schools, private schools generally recruit teachers through interviews and recommendations from university faculty. Denominational schools may use religious criteria in recruiting new staff in order to maintain their distinctiveness, even though religious instruction is limited under the school equalization policy.

Private schools are able to hire and fire teachers, but the strength of private school teachers' unions can interfere with school leaders' decisions in this vein.

Table 1 below shows the number of secondary school teaching certificates produced by teacher training institutes and that of newly recruited teachers from the year 2003 to the year 2006. Korea, unlike other OECD countries, has not experienced a teacher shortage. In some sense, Korea has an oversupply of teacher candidates in secondary education. This might be related to the fact that teaching careers in Korea are still attractive in terms of the status of the profession, salaries, and the amount of job security that teachers experience. Public and private teachers, once recruited, may work until the age of 62. Teachers with 15 years of experience in Korea make more money than teachers in most OECD countries (OECD 2005, 74).

Table 1. Newly Licensed Secondary School Teachers and the Newly Recruited Ones (2003-2006)



Year	Licensed				Recruited			B/A
	COE	Prep	GSE	Total(A)	Public	Private	Total(B)	
2003	13,918	10,100	4,601	28,619	5,467	1,914	7,381	25.8
2004	15,395	9,862	4,889	30,146	3,591	1,611	5,202	17.3
2005	17,366	10,312	5,599	33,277	4,635	1,873	6,508	19.6
2006	18,186	11,665	6,436	36,287	4,064	1,482	5,546	15.3
Total	64,865	41,939	21,525	128,329	17,757	6,880	24,637	19.5

Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007). Unpublished memo.

## *Accountability for school quality*

Until recently, there was no official quality assurance system at the primary and secondary levels of schooling in Korea. University quality, on the other hand, has been controlled by the Korean Council for University Education since 1992— this body oversees both evaluation and accreditation. Secondary schools have traditionally been evaluated by parents, mostly based upon the results of the university entrance examination; good evaluations go to schools with high numbers of students admitted to leading universities. Some claim that this process has led to examination-driven instruction in secondary schools, with an emphasis on rote learning. To combat this, the central government introduced a performance- based evaluation of students in 1996 that was intended to improve teaching practices. Universities are now required to use Student Complex Achievement Records, which provide a comprehensive evaluation of each student, including his or her academic transcripts, class standing by subject, aptitude, attendance, extracurricular activities, voluntary service, and certificates. These records are presented to universities along with other important admissions materials, such as SAT scores, essay tests, and interviews.

Another part of the effort to increase school quality has focused on accountability for school-based management. Self-managed schools undergo evaluations by provincial education offices. In turn, provincial education offices are evaluated by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. This double school evaluation system for quality assurance exists at both the primary and secondary levels of schooling. Provincial education offices evaluate all of the schools each year, with the exception of very high performing schools that are evaluated every three years. School evaluations consider: 1) school evaluation planning, 2) school self-evaluations, and 3) evaluations based on school visits, results reporting, and the use of school results to improve teaching and learning. The results of school evaluations are publicly

reported and given to schools as feedback intended to improve instruction and school management. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development evaluates each provincial education office and visits some schools for an actual inspection every other year. These evaluations are regarded as partial and indirect. The provincial education offices are subsidized in a graded ratio according to the results of each evaluation. It is believed that this new system of evaluation has contributed to improved teaching practices as well as more productive educational environments.

## *Teaching of values*

Under the Constitution, Korean public schools are required to be neutral in terms of religious values and principles. This means that public schools cannot teach a particular religion or particular religious values, as doing so may violate the *equal treatment principle* among religions in schooling.

Like the teaching of religious values in public schools, religious instruction at non-public schools is still controversial. Because students are often assigned to private schools by lottery, those in favor of religious neutrality contend that teaching particular religious values impinges upon students' freedom of religion. In this respect, one can say that private schools are private but not independently functioning. Thus, denominational schools claim that, as private schools, they should have greater autonomy and that they should be able to fulfill their purpose and mission, even if these are in conflict with the religious neutrality principal.

Generally speaking, the Revised Private School Act does not allow for the active promotion of religious values at private schools, although the issue is currently being debated. Given this, it is accurate to say that religious education at private schools is provided in a very limited fashion. These schools do not have any discretion in choosing their students. This implies that there are some limitations when it comes to the abilities of private schools to provide appropriate religious instruction for students who are assigned by lottery.

Therefore, there exist two possibilities for religious education in private schools. One is to teach general and comparative knowledge about various religions rather than directly professing a particular religion. The other is to establish alternative schools or independent private high schools for the teaching of particular religious values, as these schools can discriminate as to whom they admit and are therefore comparatively free to profess religious values without impinging upon student rights (Yoo 2006, 99). At this stage, no denominational schools have been designated as independent private high schools, although some alternative schools based on specific denominations do exist.

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